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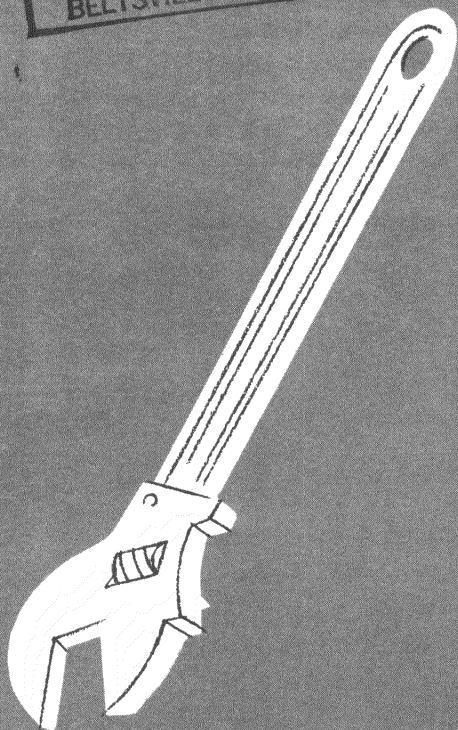
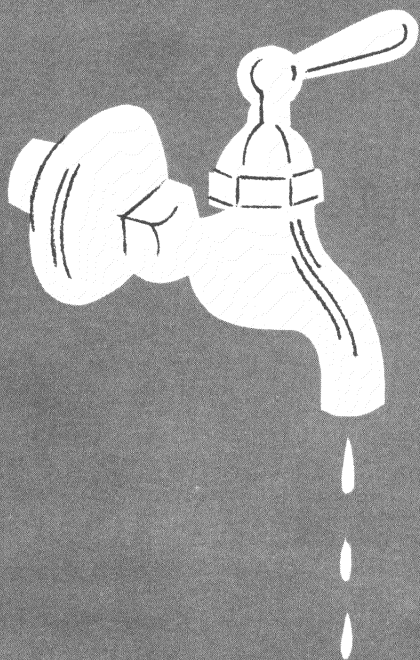
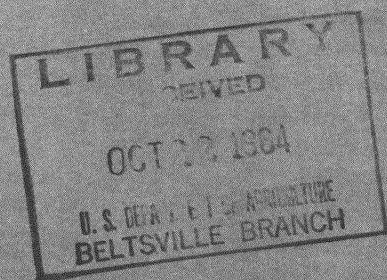
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# SIMPLE PLUMBING REPAIRS

■ for the Home  
and Farmstead



Farmer's Bulletin No. 2202  
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# SIMPLE PLUMBING REPAIRS

## ■ for the Home and Farmstead

You can save money and avoid delays by making minor plumbing repairs yourself.

Jobs that a farmer or homeowner can do with a few basic tools include:

- Repairing water faucets and valves.
- Repairing leaks in pipes and tanks.
- Thawing frozen pipes.
- Repairing water closets.
- Clearing clogged drains.

Extensive plumbing repairs or alterations in the plumbing system usually require authorization from local authorities and possibly inspection of the completed work. Therefore, such work should be done by a qualified or licensed plumber.

### REPAIRING WATER FAUCETS AND VALVES

Water faucets and globe valves serve the same purpose, in that they control the flow of water. The essential difference is that faucets are used at discharge points over fixtures such as sinks, lavatories, and tubs, while valves are used to close off portions of the plumbing system.

Other types of valves, such as

check valves, gate valves, and pressure-reducing valves, are seldom required in farmstead plumbing.

Faucets and globe valves are very similar in construction (fig. 1) and repair instructions given below apply to both. (Your faucets or valves may differ somewhat in general design from the one shown in fig. 1, because both faucets and valves come in a wide variety of styles.)

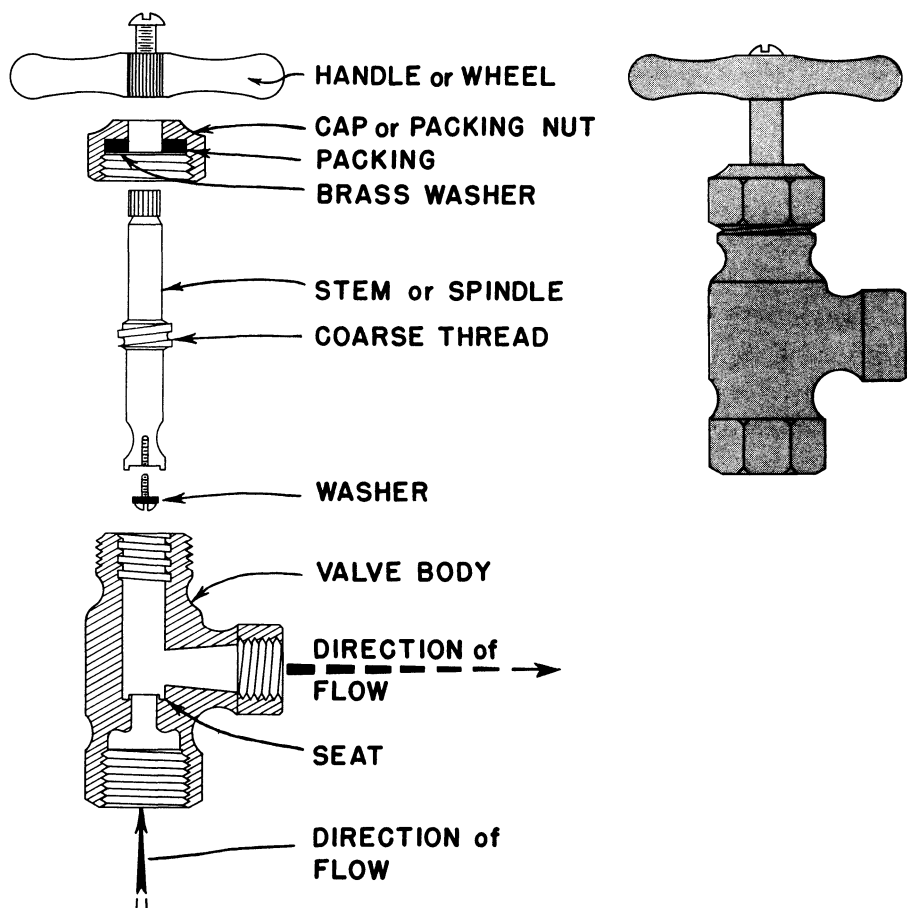
Mixing faucets, which are found on sinks, laundry trays, and bathtubs, are actually two separate units with a common spout. Each unit is independently repaired.

If a faucet drips when closed or vibrates ("sings" or "flutters") when opened, the trouble is usually a worn washer at the lower end of the spindle. If it leaks around the spindle when opened, new packing is needed. To replace the washer—

- Shut off the water at the shutoff valve nearest the particular faucet.

- Disassemble the faucet—the handle, packing nut, packing, and spindle, in that order. You may have to set the handle back on the spindle and use it to unscrew and remove the spindle.

- Remove the screw and worn



**Figure 1.—Globe-type angle valve.**

washer from the spindle. Scrape all the worn washer parts from the cup and install a new washer. If you do not have the proper size washer, file down a larger one; do not use one that is too small.

● Examine the seat on the faucet body. If it is nicked or rough, reface it. Hardware or plumbing-supply stores carry the necessary seat-dressing tool. *Hold the tool vertically when re-facing the seat.*

● Reassemble the faucet. Handles of mixing faucets should be in matched positions.

To replace the packing, simply remove the handle, packing nut, and old packing, and install a new packing washer. If a packing washer is not available, you can wrap stranded graphite-asbestos wicking around the spindle. Turn the packing nut down tight against the wicking.

Other faucet parts may be replaced as necessary.

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## PRECAUTIONS

Polluted water or sewage may carry such diseases as typhoid fever and amoebic dysentery. If you do your own plumbing work, be sure that—

- There are no leaks in drain-pipes through which sewage or sewage gases can escape.

- There are no cross connections between piping carrying water from different sources unless there can be reasonable certainty that all sources are safe and will remain safe.

- There can be no back siphonage of water from plumbing fixtures or other containers into the water-supply system.

Once a pipe has become polluted, it may be difficult to free it of the pollution. For this reason, building codes do not permit the use of second-hand pipe. All initial piping and parts and

subsequent replacements should be new.

Since a plumbing system will require service from time to time, shutoff valves should be installed at strategic locations so that an affected portion can be isolated (water flow to it cut off) with minimum disturbance to service in the rest of the system. Shutoff valves are usually provided on the water closet supply line, on the hot- and cold-water supply line to each sink, tub, and lavatory, and on the water heater supply line. Drain valves are usually installed for water-supply piping systems and for hot-water storage tanks.

A pressure-relief valve should be installed for the water heater storage tank to relieve pressure buildup in case of overheating.

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Complete faucet inserts in which the washer does not turn on the seat are available. This feature prolongs washer life indefinitely.

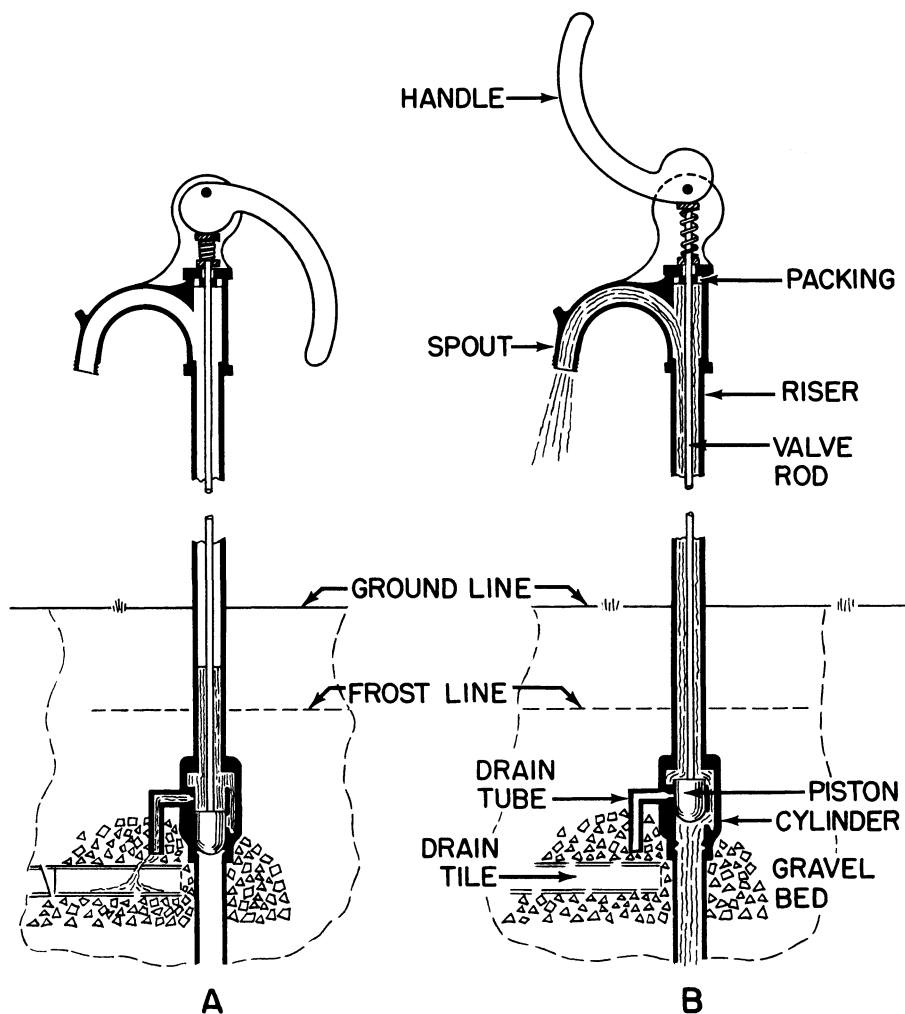
Several new faucet designs aimed at easier operation, eliminating drip, and promoting long service life, are on the market. Instructions for repair may be obtained from dealers.

If a shower head drips, the supply valve has not been fully closed, or the valve needs repair.

## FROSTPROOF HYDRANTS

Frostproof hydrants are basically faucets, although they may differ somewhat in design from ordinary faucets.

Two important features of a frostproof hydrant are: (1) The valve is installed underground—below the frostline—to prevent freezing, and (2) the valve is designed to drain the water from the hydrant when the valve is closed.



**Figure 2.** – Frostproof hydrant: A, Closed; B, opened. As soon as the hydrant is closed, water left in the riser drains out the drain tube as shown in A. This prevents water from freezing in the hydrant in cold weather.

Figure 2 shows one type of frostproof hydrant. It works as follows: When the handle is raised, the piston rises, opening the valve. Water flows from the supply pipe into the cylinder, up through the riser, and out the spout. When the handle is pushed down, the piston goes down, closing the

valve and stopping the flow of water. Water left in the hydrant flows out the drain tube into a small gravel-filled dry well or drain pit.

As with ordinary faucets, leakage will probably be the most common trouble encountered with frostproof hydrants. Worn packing, gaskets, and

washers can cause leakage. Disassemble the hydrant as necessary to replace or repair these and other parts.

## REPAIRING LEAKS IN PIPES AND TANKS

### Pipes

Leaks in pipes usually result from corrosion or from damage to the pipe. Pipes may be damaged by freezing, by vibration caused by machinery operating nearby, by water hammer, or by animals bumping into the pipe. (Water hammer is discussed on p. 8.)

#### *Corrosion*

Occasionally waters are encountered that corrode metal pipe and tubing. (Some acid soils also corrode metal pipe and tubing.)

The corrosion usually occurs, in varying degrees, along the entire length of pipe rather than at some particular point. An exception would be where dissimilar metals, such as copper and steel, are joined.

Treatment of the water may solve the problem of corrosion.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, you may have to replace the piping with a type made of material that will be less subject to the corrosive action of the water.

It is good practice to get a

chemical analysis of the water before selecting materials for a plumbing system. Your State college or university may be equipped to make an analysis; if not, you can have it done by a private laboratory.

#### *Repairing Leaks*

Pipes that are split by hard freezing must be replaced.

A leak at a threaded connection can often be stopped by unscrewing the fitting and applying a pipe joint compound that will seal the joint when the fitting is screwed back together.

Small leaks in a pipe can often be repaired with a rubber patch and metal clamp or sleeve. This must be considered as an emergency repair job and should be followed by permanent repair as soon as practicable.

Large leaks in a pipe may require cutting out the damaged section and installing a new piece of pipe. At least one union will be required unless the leak is near the end of the pipe. You can make a temporary repair with plastic or rubber tubing. The tubing must be strong enough to withstand the normal water pressure in the pipe. It should be slipped over the open ends of the piping and fastened with pipe clamps or several turns of wire.

Vibration sometimes breaks solder joints in copper tubing, causing leaks. If the joint is accessible, clean and resolder

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<sup>1</sup> Information about water treatment may be obtained from your county agricultural agent or from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250.



it. The tubing must be dry before it can be heated to soldering temperature. Leaks in places not readily accessible usually require the services of a plumber and sometimes of both a plumber and a carpenter.

## Tanks

Leaks in tanks are usually caused by corrosion. Sometimes, a safety valve may fail to open and the pressure developed will spring a leak.

While a leak may occur at only one place in the tank wall, the wall may also be corroded thin in other places. Therefore, any repair should be considered as temporary, and the tank should be replaced as soon as possible.

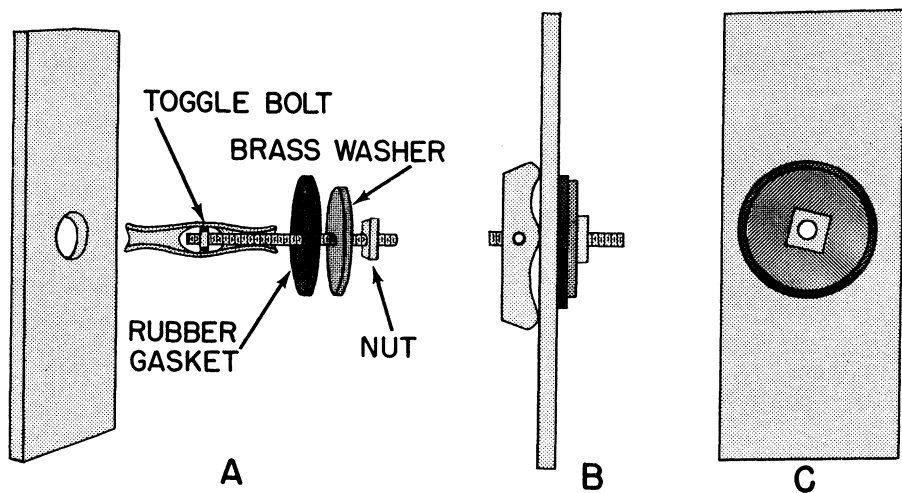
A leak can be temporarily repaired with a toggle bolt, rubber gasket, and brass

washer, as shown in figure 3. You may have to drill or ream the hole larger to insert the toggle bolt. Draw the bolt up tight to compress the rubber gasket against the tank wall.

## WATER HAMMER

Water hammer sometimes occurs when a faucet is suddenly closed. When the flow of water is suddenly stopped, its kinetic energy is expended against the walls of the piping. This causes the piping to vibrate, and leaks or other damage may result.

Water hammer may be prevented or its severity reduced by installing an air chamber just ahead of the faucet. The air chamber may be a piece of air-filled pipe or tubing, about 2 feet long, extending vertically from the pipe. It must be air-



**Figure 3.**—Closing a hole in a tank: *A*, The link of the toggle bolt is passed through the hole in the tank (hole is enlarged if necessary). *B*, Side view of tank edge (nut is drawn up tightly to compress washer and gasket against tank). *C*, Outside view of completed repair.

tight. Commercial devices designed to prevent water hammer are also available.

An air chamber requires occasional replenishing of the air to prevent it from becoming waterlogged—that is, full of water instead of air.

A hydropneumatic tank, such as the type used in individual water systems, serves as an air chamber, preventing or reducing water hammer.

## FROZEN WATER PIPES

In cold weather, water may freeze in underground pipes laid above the frostline or in pipes in unheated buildings, in open crawl spaces under buildings, or in outside walls.

*When water freezes it expands. Unless a pipe can also expand, it may rupture when the water freezes. Iron pipe and steel pipe do not expand appreciably. Copper pipe will stretch some, but does not resume its original dimensions when thawed out; repeated freezings will cause it to fail eventually. Flexible plastic tubing may stand repeated freezes, but it is good practice to prevent it from freezing.*

## Preventing Freezing

Pipes may be insulated to prevent freezing, but this is not a completely dependable method. Insulation does not stop the loss of heat from the pipe—merely slows it down—and the water may freeze if it stands in the pipe long enough at below-freezing temperature. Also, if the insulation becomes wet, it may lose its effectiveness.

Electric heating cable can supply the continual heat needed to prevent pipes from freezing. The cable should be wrapped around the pipe as shown in figure 4 and covered with insulation.

## Thawing

Use of electric heating cable is the best method of thawing frozen pipe, because the entire length of the pipe is thawed at one time (fig. 4).

Thawing pipe with a blowtorch can be dangerous. The water may get hot enough at the point where the torch is applied to generate sufficient steam under pressure to rupture the pipe. Steam from the break could severely scald you.

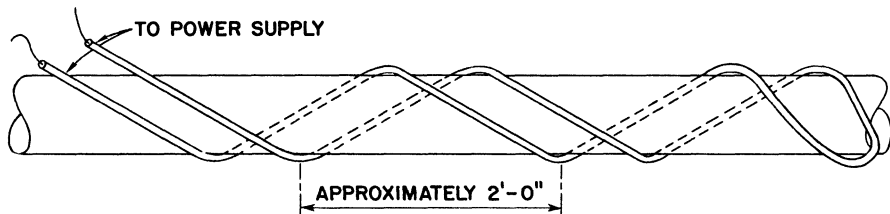


Figure 4.—Application of heating cable to pipe to prevent freezing.

Thawing pipe with hot water is safer than thawing with a blowtorch. One method is to cover the pipe with rags and then pour the hot water over the rags.

When thawing pipe with a blowtorch, hot water, or similar methods, open a faucet and start thawing at that point. The open faucet will permit steam to escape, thus reducing the chance of the buildup of dangerous pressure. Do not allow the steam to condense and refreeze before it reaches the faucet.

Underground *metal* pipes can be thawed by passing a low-voltage electric current through them. The current will heat the entire length of pipe through which it passes. Both ends of

the pipe must be open to prevent the buildup of steam pressure. **CAUTION: This method of thawing frozen pipe can be dangerous and should be done by an experienced person only. It cannot be used to thaw plastic tubing or other non-electricity-conducting pipe or tubing.**

## REPAIRING WATER CLOSETS

Water closets vary in general design and in the design of the flushing mechanism. But they are enough alike that general repair instructions can suffice for all designs.

### Flushing Mechanism

Figure 5 shows a common type of flushing mechanism. Parts

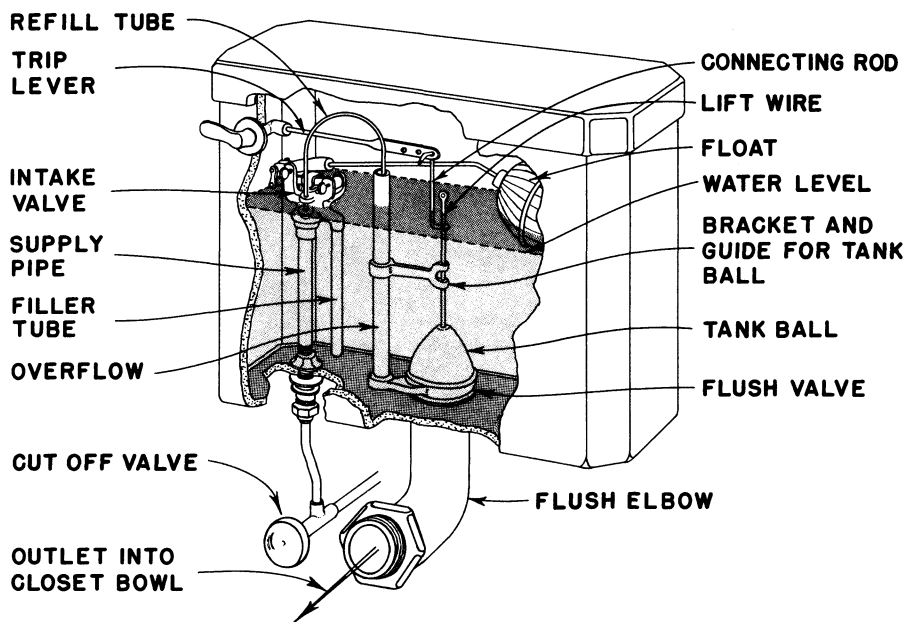


Figure 5.—Water closet flush tank.

that usually require repair are the flush valve, the intake (float) valve, and the float ball.

### ***Flush Valve***

The rubber ball of the flush valve may get soft or out of shape and fail to seat properly. This causes the valve to leak. Unscrew the ball from the lift wire and install a new one.

The trip lever or lift wire may corrode and fail to work smoothly, or the lift wire may bind in the guides. Disassemble and clean off corrosion or replace parts as necessary.

When working on the flush valve, stop the flow of water by propping up the float with a piece of wood. Be careful not to bend the float rod out of its proper alignment.

### ***Intake (Float) Valve***

A worn plunger washer in the supply valve will cause the valve to leak. To replace the washer—

- Shut off the water and drain the tank.

- Unscrew the two thumb-screws that hold the levers and push out the levers.

- Lift out the plunger, unscrew the cup on the bottom, and insert a new washer. The washer is made of material such as rubber or leather.

- Examine the washer seat. If nicked or rough, it may need refacing.

If the float-valve assembly is badly corroded, replace it.

### ***Float Ball***

The float ball may develop a leak and fail to rise to the proper position. (Correct water level is about 1 inch below the top of the overflow tube or enough to give a good flush.) If the ball fails to rise, the intake valve will remain open and water will continue to flow. Brass float balls can sometimes be drained and the leak soldered. Other types must be replaced. When working on the float ball, be careful to keep the rod aligned so that the ball will float freely and close the valve properly.

### ***Water Closet Bowl Removal***

An obstruction in the water closet trap or leakage around the bottom of the water-closet bowl may require removal of the bowl. Follow this procedure:

- Shut off the water.

- Empty the tank and bowl by siphoning or sponging out the water.

- Disconnect the water pipes to the tank (see fig. 5).

- Disconnect the tank from the bowl if the water closet is a two-piece unit. Set the tank where it cannot be damaged. Handle tank and bowl carefully; they are made of vitreous china or porcelain and are easily chipped or broken.

- Remove the seat and cover from the bowl.

- Carefully pry loose the bolt covers and remove the bolts holding the bowl to the floor

flange (fig. 6). Jar the bowl enough to break the seal at the bottom. Set the bowl upside down on something that will not chip or break it.

- Remove the obstruction from the discharge opening.

- Place a new wax seal around the bowl horn and press it into place. A wax seal (or gasket) may be obtained from hardware or plumbing-supply stores.

- Set the bowl in place and press it down firmly. Install the bolts that hold it to the floor flange. Draw the bolts up

snugly, but not too tight because the bowl may break. The bowl must be level. Keep a carpenter's level on it while drawing up the bolts. If the house has settled, leaving the floor sloping, it may be necessary to use shims to make the bowl set level. Replace the bolt covers.

- Install the tank and connect the water pipes to it. It is advisable to replace all gaskets, after first cleaning the surfaces thoroughly.

- Test for leaks by flushing a few times.

- Install the seat and cover.

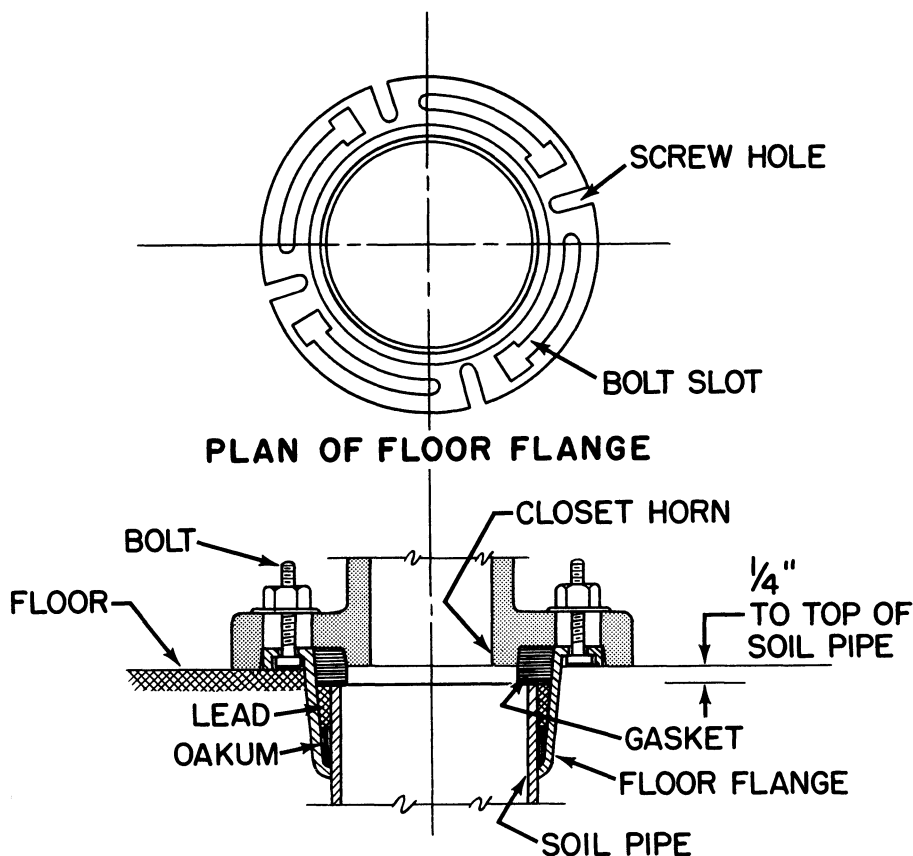


Figure 6.—Connection of water closet to floor and soil pipe.

## Water Closet "Sweating"

When cold water enters a water closet tank, it may chill the tank enough to cause "sweating" (condensation of atmospheric moisture on the outer surface of the tank). This can be prevented either by warming the water before it enters the tank or by insulating the tank to keep the temperature of the outer surface above the dewpoint temperature of the surrounding air. A tempering device that will mix a little hot water with the cold may be installed on the water-supply line to the tank to warm the water. Insulating jackets or liners that fit inside water-closet tanks and serve to keep the outer surface warm are available from plumbing-supply dealers.

## CLEARING CLOGGED DRAINS

Drains may become clogged by objects dropped into them or by accumulations of grease, dirt, or other matter.

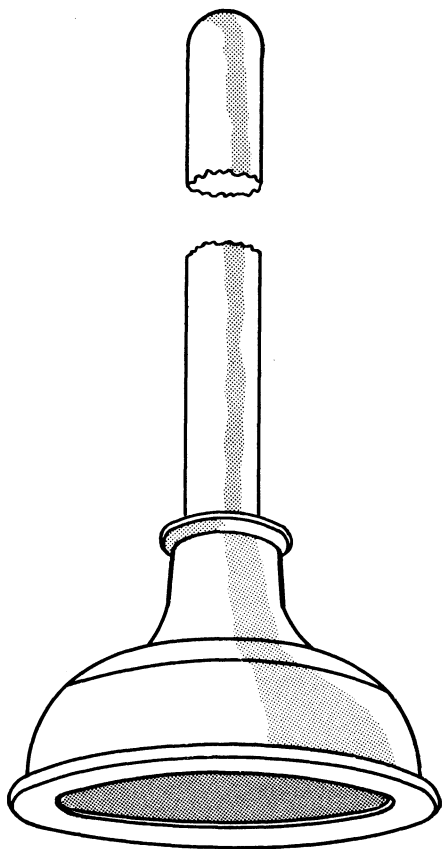
### Fixture and Floor Drains

If the obstruction is in a fixture trap, usually the trap can be removed and cleared. If the obstruction is elsewhere in the pipe, other means must be used.

Cleanout augers—long, flexible, steel cables commonly called "snakes"—may be run down drainpipes to break up

obstructions or to hook onto and pull out objects. Augers are made in various lengths and diameters and are available at hardware and plumbing-supply stores. (In some cases, you may have to call a plumber, who will probably have a power-driven auger.)

Small obstructions can sometimes be forced down or drawn up by use of an ordinary rubber force cup (plunger or "plumber's friend") (fig. 7).



*Figure 7.*—Rubber force cup (plunger or "plumber's friend").

Water pressure from a hose may break up an obstruction or force an object on through the pipe. If you try this method, insert the hose end well down in the pipe. Wrap rags around the hose where it enters the pipe to minimize backflow of water.

Grease and soap clinging to a pipe can sometimes be removed by flushing with hot water. Lye or lye mixed with a small amount of aluminum shavings may also be used. When water is added to the mixture, the violent gas-forming reaction and production of heat that takes place loosens the grease and soap so that they can be flushed away. *Use cold water only.* Chemical cleaners should not be used in pipes that are completely stopped up, because they must be brought into direct contact with the stoppage to be effective. Handle the material with extreme care and follow directions on the container. If lye spills on the hands or clothing, wash with cold water immediately. If any gets into the eyes, flush with cold water and call a doctor.

Sand, dirt, or clothing lint sometimes clogs floor drains. Remove the strainer and ladle out as much of the sediment as possible. You may have to carefully chip away the concrete around the strainer to free it. Flush the drain with clean water. If pressure is needed, use a garden hose. Wrap cloths around the hose where it enters

the drain to prevent backflow of water. You may have to stand on this plug to keep it in place when the water is turned on.

Occasional flushing of floor drains may prevent clogging.

## Outside Drains

Roots growing through cracks or defective joints sometimes clog outside drains or sewers. You can clear the stoppage temporarily by using a root-cutting tool. However, to prevent future trouble, you should re-lay the defective portion of the line, using sound pipe and making sure that all joints are watertight.<sup>2</sup> It is wise to keep sewer lines out of reach of roots.

## TOOLS AND SPARE PARTS

### Tools

Basic tools that you should have on hand to make simple plumbing repairs include:

Wrenches, including pipe wrenches, in a range of sizes to fit the pipe, fittings, fixtures, equipment, and appliances in the system.

Screwdrivers in a range of sizes to fit the faucets, valves, and other parts of the system.

Ball peen hammer or a 12- or 16-ounce clawhammer.

Rubber force cup (plunger or "plumber's friend").

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<sup>2</sup>For information about laying sewers, see Agriculture Information Bulletin 274, "Farmstead Sewage and Refuse Disposal," available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250.

Cold chisel and center punch.

Cleanout auger ("snake").

Friction tape.

Adjustable pliers.

Additional tools required for more extensive plumbing repairs include:

Pipe vise.

Set of pipe threading dies and stocks.

Hacksaw and blades (blades should have 32 teeth per inch).

Pipe cutter, roller type.

Tapered reamer or half-round file.

Carpenter's brace.

Set of wood bits.

Gasoline blowtorch.

Lead pot and ladle.

Calking tools.

Copper tube cutter with reamer (if you have copper tubing).

Always use the proper size wrench or screwdriver. Do not use pipe wrenches on nuts with flat surfaces; use an adjustable or open end wrench. Do not use pipe wrenches on polished-surface tubings or fittings, such as found on plumbing fixtures; use a strap wrench. Tight nuts or fittings can sometimes be loosened by tapping lightly with a hammer or mallet.

When cutting pipe with a hacksaw, insert the pipe through a block of hard wood as shown in figure 8. A slot sawed in the block guides the saw during the cutting.

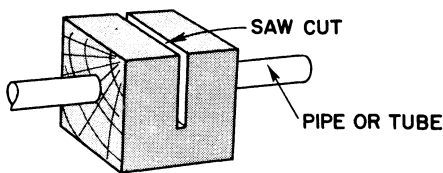


Figure 8.—Wood block for cutting pipe or tubing.

## Spare Parts

It should not be necessary to stock a large number of spare parts. Past plumbing troubles may give some indication as to the kind of parts most likely to be needed. Spare parts should include:

Faucet washers and packing.

One or two lengths of the most common type and size of piping in the plumbing system.

Several unions and gaskets or unions with ground surfaces.

Several couplings and elbows.

A few feet of pipe strap.

An extra hose connection.

## EMERGENCIES

Grouped below are emergencies that may occur and the action to take. The name, address, and phone number of a plumber who offers 24-hour service should be posted in a conspicuous place.

*Burst pipe or tank.*—Immediately cut off the flow of water by closing the shutoff valve nearest to the break. Then arrange for repair.

*Water closet overflow.*—Do not use water closet until back in working order. Check for and remove stoppage in closet bowl outlet, drain line from closet to sewer, or sewer or septic tank. If stoppage is due to root entry into pipe, repair of pipe at that point is recommended.

*Rumbling noise in hot water tank.*—This is likely a sign of overheating which could lead to the development of explosive



pressure. (Another indication of overheating is hot water backing up in the cold-water supply pipe.) Cut off the burner immediately. Be sure that the pressure-relief valve is operative. Then check (with a thermometer) the temperature of the water at the nearest outlet. If above that for which the gage is set, check the thermostat that controls burner cutoff. If you cannot correct the trouble, call a plumber.

*Cold house.*—If the heating system fails (or if you close the house and turn off the heat)

when there is a chance of sub-freezing weather, completely drain the plumbing system. A drain valve is usually provided at the low point of the water supply piping for this purpose. A pump, storage tank, hot-water tank, water closet tank, water-treatment apparatus, and other water-system appliances or accessories should also be drained. Put antifreeze in all fixture and drain traps.

Hot-water and steam heating systems should also be drained when the house temperature may drop below freezing.